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Yale University Prize Poem

1899

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

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YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

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THOAS

AN EPILOGUE TO GOETHE'S IPHIGENIE AUF TAURIS

BY

ARTHUR S. MANN

NEW HAVEN
TUTTLE, MOREHOUSE, AND TAYLOR
1899

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Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, has been secretly carried by Artemis to the land of the Taurians, and there serves in the temple of the goddess. She soon gains the favor of King Thoas, and is sought by him in marriage. Upon the appearance of her brother Orestes, with Pylades, in the country, she asks the consent of the king to return with them to Greece. After a severe struggle with himself he yields, and grants permission for them to depart.

235129

THOAS

An Epilogue to Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris

Did she not say that it was for the best
That she should cross the loud-resounding sea,
And, tossing on the crested waves, again
Behold the purple coastline rise to sight?
Perhaps it was the best; perhaps her heart,
Eating itself out here with longing deep,
Might have destroyed the happiness of both.
Better to feel a passing pain, though sharp,
Than ever to have with me day and night
Her pale and chiding look.
Ah with what grace
And eager earnestness she begged from me
To let her go once more unto her home!
How at the name of Greece the sparkles played
Upon those deep blue eyes, like sunbeams glancing

From off the dark waves of a mountain lake,
Rippling and bright, but deep in mystery!
But once before have I beheld her thus,
And that was when I granted her request
To do away the ancient sacrifice.
For then her face, in wont so calm and grave,
As did beseem a priestess, changed its look,
And glowed in happy, girlish smiles; and then
She seized my hands, and poured out all her thanks
In words that showed the eager ardent spirit
Better than years of faithful temple service
And wise advice to me, the king. Ah then
Were locked, O Iphigenie, those strong chains
Which thy fair face and golden words had long
Been forging for my spirit; and those chains
Shall never now slip link from link until
In Lethe's waves I shall find peace again.

How can I let thee go? How can I bear
To pass the weary, slowly moving years
Without thee at my side? Why did I not,
When she was helpless at my feet, speak out
One kingly word and claim the prize as mine?
O for one moment's glorious maddening joy,
To see those proud eyes drop before my look,
To seize that soft white body in my arms,
To feel the pulse of life beat wildly high—
That would be triumph, that be victory!

Gone, gone forever! How the word sounds cold
And mocking in my ears! Just so would seem
A crow's harsh caw above the fresh laid sod
Where all one's love lay buried. Even hope,
The one gift granted to allay the swarm
Of human ills, is gone; on me is poured
The heaviest curse the mighty three can give.

235129

Why have the gods dealt with me thus? Have I
Lacked aught in reverence, or with impious hands
Defiled their holy places? Have I not
Served much more faithfully than many men
Whom I behold in happiness and pride;
While I, who in all things have sought to live
According to their will, am now bereft
Of wife, of son, and of a destined bride?
Answer me that, aloud I call to you!
Answer me, powers of earth, air, heaven, or sea.
No answer comes, but still the great waves roll
Relentlessly upon the sandy beach,
And earth lies wrapped in silence like the Sphinx.
With dread the future comes before my mind,
Nor life, nor death, can give me joy or hope.

1681

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